

2 Greens campaign for Senate

Feinstein criticized

By John Buzbee
STAFF WRITER

Two years after the Green Party won a place for its candidates on California ballots, two Greens are slugging it out for the right to challenge U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein in one of the party's first primary battles.

But like everything else about the environmentalist, pacifist party, the issues in the primary are not politics as usual.

The candidate backed by local Green organizations had wanted all Greens to stay out of the race, while her opponent can't do much about his main deficiency. He's male.

"Gender is a significant issue, but policy-making in office is a far more important measure of Green values," said Kent Smith, who is running against Barbara Blong in the June 7 primary.

But Blong says it would be wrong for the Greens, who emphasize their support for diversity in politics and government, to back a male



Barbara Blong



Kent Smith

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FROM PAGE A1

Green

candidate against one of only six women in the U.S. Senate.

"We really want to promote nonviolence and post-patriarchal values," Blong said. "We have to make it safe for women to become candidates."

At the Green convention January in San Francisco, Smith thwarted a move by party leaders to keep all Green candidates out of the race. Green strategists wanted to focus their efforts on local races, and they feared a Green Senate candidate would draw support away from Feinstein, a Democrat, thus helping her Republican opponent.

'Real world'

"That's always a consideration," Blong said. "We're running in the real world. We don't want to see another Republican in the Senate."

Party rules allow the convention to close the race to Green candidates with the approval of a "super-majority" of 80 percent of the delegates.

Most delegates approved, but Smith got enough support to block it, said Mike Feinstein, a Green organizer in Santa Monica. About 1.1 percent of Santa Monica voters are registered Green, the party's highest percentage in Los Angeles County.

Two Green candidates also are running for the nomination for governor, but Mike Feinstein said several local Green

organizations are urging voters to select a third option in that race, "None of the above."

But Smith said the absence of contested primaries in 1992 caused party registration to drop from 105,000 to 93,000. Voters who were registered Green could not participate in contested Democratic or Republican primaries.

"It was vitally important to me that 80 Greens in San Francisco not make the decision that should be made by our 92,000 registered members," he said.

Blong and Smith do share many positions, and they are equally critical of the incumbent Feinstein.

More bombers

"She's pro-nuke," Smith said. "She thinks the solution to California's economic problems are to build more B-2 bombers."

"She's whipped up this hysteria," Blong said. "Crime has not increased in the last couple of years. It's diminished. Dianne's hoping and the media's hoping to throw people off so they won't look at the real issues, at what's happening to the economy."

They both support large cuts in defense spending. Smith would refund the money to taxpayers to be spent locally for schools, clinics and day-care centers. Blong would use the money to finance locally run job programs to perform tasks such

as cleaning up closed military bases.

Smith, 52, is a former teacher and Green candidate for the state Senate in 1992. He now lives in Sacramento.

Blong, 50, is a political activist and graduate student at San Francisco State University. She ran for the state Senate on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket in 1976.

About a dozen local Green organizations have endorsed Blong. Even Smith's native Nevada County dropped its endorsement of him and voted to stay neutral after Blong announced her candidacy.

"Most of the counties in the state had strong support for the idea of Barbara running," Mike Feinstein said. "There has been very strong support internally for her."

Whichever candidate wins, Smith said, the race will help the party.

"It was absolutely essential that we have a hot, sexy meaningful primary for the first time in Green Party history," he said.